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MR. WILLARD'S ORATION.

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ORATION

DELIVERED AT LANCASTER, MASS.

IN CELEBRATION OF

AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE,

JULY, 1825.

BY JOSEPH WILLARD.

BOSTON.

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1825.

To JOSEPH WILLARD Esq. *Lancaster, July* 5, 1825.

Sir,

The Committee of Arrangements, in behalf of their fellow citizens who celebrated the anniversary of our national independence at Lancaster, return you thanks for your excellent oration, and request a copy of the same for the press.

For the Committee.

HORATIO CARTER.

To Mr. HORATIO CARTER. *Lancaster, July* 5, 1825.

Sir,

In compliance with the request of the Committee of Arrangements, I submit to their disposal and indulgence the following oration, which, by reason of indisposition and necessary avocations, I was obliged to delay writing till the last few days. With assurances of esteem,

I am, &c.

J. WILLARD.

ORATION.

We have assembled to commemorate an event distinguished in our political annals for the glorious recollections of the past that gather around it; distinguished also for the bright hopes with which it gilds the future; an event without a parallel in any age, if we consider the consequences that have flowed, and still continue to flow from it. We look on every side, and find ourselves in the midst of a vast and populous community. Our existence as a nation is no longer a problem; a half century of self-government has proved that the speculations of our fathers were moulded in wisdom, and what was deemed by all an experiment, and by many a very rash one, has exceeded the expectations of friends, and destroyed the doubts and fears of the timid.

Many were the predictions that our national existence would be short. Those who loved their country, and were ready to make sacrifices in her behalf, looked foward to a prospect that to them seemed gloomy,—to a prospect that shadowed out, at no remote period, decay and dissolution.

They thought they saw a frame of government, whose elements were untempered, and which, like

the image beheld by the king of Babylon in his vision, would crumble at the first shock. But, if I may use the expression, no nation ever perished in infancy; the history of the world shows none. By the order of nature and the course of events, nations have their period of youth and mature existence. Factions may arise and shake them to the very centre; war, with its horrors, may visit them; the fairest and brightest may be cut off; but the spirit they possess is not quickly lost: they must pass through many vicissitudes; they must see many dark hours, and many perhaps of glory; many of weakness and strength, before they can perish politically from the earth.

There is nothing in our situation alarming, but every thing to nourish the highest hopes. We smile at the predictions that once were not entirely without the sanction of public opinion. We were told that our civil institutions of government were not fitted for a thickly settled and extensive territory. Your government may last, perhaps, whilst the Alleghanies are a barrier to your people against the hostile tribes of the west; but should you pass the mountains, and extend your settlements to the Wabash, and roll your population along with the waters of the Ohio, the planet that has risen so rapidly, and looked portentous to the world, and bid fair to be lord of the ascendant, will sink in endless night.

Your complicated machinery of sovereign states and a federate government will soon crumble; perpetual conflicts will spring up from your diverse and jarring interests. But the Wabash and the Ohio now roll through a country abounding in population, and water the soil that is cultivated by civilized man. Still westward and westward sets the current of emigration. States not forty years old feel crowded; at this moment they are sending forth adventurers, their hardy sons, to find room for expansion. The Mississippi is but a resting place on this wide spreading highway; and towns have sprung up on the distant banks of the Missouri, enjoying the conveniences and many of the luxuries of what is called the old world of America.

Soon the Stony Mountains, and the intermediate sandy wastes of the Platte and the Yellow Stone, will be passed, and this generation may behold a people with our institutions, speaking our language, with our habits and feelings, covering the banks of the Columbia, and the shores of the Pacific.

This is no fanciful speculation; what has already been accomplished may lay claim to the miraculous, if what remains to be done be considered of exceeding difficulty. Other nations have risen to power by slow progression, and through various casualties; but here the word seems scarcely to have been spoken, and an empire has sprung into existence, like "Pallas armed and undefiled." A little one has swollen to

twelve millions, increasing in knowledge, the arts, wealth, and all that enters into the substance of national power; or serves for its embellishment. No sea is there that is not full of our commerce and fisheries; no port that has not been visited by our citizens; whilst in the mean time our civil institutions have been gaining strength, as the sphere of their operations has extended on every side, and are before the world in expressive silence, a beacon and a blessing to the nations that are toiling after freedom.

I have no relish for a weak national vanity, that would indulge itself in an over-estimate of what is valuable at home, and look with contempt upon the rest of the world. But I thank God, that descriptions and speculations, however much they may seem to borrow from the imagination, must run wild in luxuriance to exceed the naked, sober truth. We are but of yesterday, "driven rather than sent to these shores," and already stand conspicuous amongst the powers of the earth. Old rules here lose their force: in a few years we do the work of ages, and gain the point where history tells us other nations arrive after centuries of exertion. Whilst yet in the cradle, like the infant Hercules, we strangled the serpents that were sent for our destruction.

Our situation and advantages are subjects of gratitude, not of pride and conceit. We are accused of vain exultations on account of our rapid growth.

We have, perhaps, been fond of indulging in a very complacent state of feeling and remark in speaking of our privileges, and of our prospects of increasing greatness. We have considered the future as present, and have acted upon prospective results, as if the day of accomplishment had arrived. For all this, however, we are not without excuse. The actual increase is so great, the resources of the country are developing so rapidly, every thing that constitutes a powerful nation is hastening on so singularly, that while we are speaking of future advancement, the future becomes present with the completion of all that we had expected. Time has as it were changed his mode of computation; days stand for months, and a few years answer all the purposes of an age. We cannot hasten, we cannot impede the progress, it naturally follows from the peculiarly happy station we hold; the result of what our fathers did for us.

Contented at home and exerting ourselves for our beloved country like good citizens, we should disregard the calumnies that have been cast upon us from abroad. They have been poured forth, it is true, with an unsparing hand; we have been ridiculed for our pretensions; have been made the subjects of innumerable falsehoods; our institutions and the nature of our government have been grossly misunderstood; we have been made the sport of satire in lighter moments, and the gravest charges have been brought against us in hours of calm reflection. Noth-

ing has been too gross, no wilful misrepresentation too bold, for those who have filled their mouths with slander. Sweeping conclusions have been drawn from single instances, exceptions taken for rules, and individual cases of crime, construed as decisive proof of general depravity. But the time of these things is fast passing away; every day we live down many calumnies; respect for ourselves as a people demands that the war of retaliation should cease, and forbids any other answer or retort, than the example we set; if this is insufficient, we have no other shield, we deserve the worst fate that hostile feeling can wish.

But true patriotism consists not in resting satisfied with what has already been accomplished, neither is it discovered by a multitude of words, nor is it blind to public faults. It is not a spirit that vapours in the bar-room, or gathers inspiration from the cask: it is active, hastening the progress of improvement; disinterested, making sacrifices of individual comfort for the general good.

In no single case can it be better shown, than in endeavours to promote the diffusion of knowledge. Look over our country, and see what vast sums are annually raised in the old states, and the reservations of land that are made in the new states, for the purpose of education alone, whose blessings, free to all, open to all, are brought to the fireside of the humblest individual. But even here there is room for improvement. I confine the remark to our own

state. Are we as active in promoting the cause of education as our situation, the spirit of the age, and circumstances demand? How stand we in this respect compared with our fathers? Do we not far outstrip them in our regard for free schools, and the intellectual cultivation of the great body of the people? No; to our shame be it said, and repeated too, we are as far behind them in these things, as we are in advance of them in population and wealth. They built up schools, to use the language of the times, "to the end that learning may not be buried in the graves of our forefathers in church and commonwealth." And look for a moment at their situation; in a wilderness, to be subdued by the hard hand of toil; in poverty, surrounded by inveterate and treacherous foes; compelled, and that not unfrequently, to go forth to their daily labours, yea, to the worship of their God in the sanctuary, with arms in their hands to protect themselves, their wives, and their children. These men made better public provision for the diffusion of knowledge, according to their ability, than is enjoyed at the present day, excepting in a few of our largest towns. Massachusetts, a humble, poor, dependent colony in 1647, with an existence of but eighteen years, exerted herself more strenuously for the good cause, than Massachusetts, independent, powerful, and rich, in 1825.

Let me not be misunderstood; I speak solely of our free schools. The liberality of individuals is

great; they have expended, and will continue to expend, untold sums in colleges, academies, and private schools; and the beneficial results continually force themselves upon our notice. But the poor man's son who aspires to a finished education, is shut out from academies and private schools; he cannot go *there*, and, in the language of inspiration, "buy without money and without price." He seeks for the grammar schools, where genius, though clothed in rags, once found encouragement and instruction; where the streams once flowed, open to every one; but the doors are barred against him, against *all*, by the strong arm of the government. He is compelled to sit down in silence, and lament for the sad necessities that encircle him, or to trust to the charities of others, to be stung, it may be, to the very soul with the chill feeling of dependency. We would respect public authorities, we would reverence public opinion when fully, calmly, and fairly expressed. In this instance, as in most others, the Legislature followed the general voice, instead of directing it. It is we, the people, who have blinded our own eyes, by disregarding the law while it existed, or by loosely enforcing its injunctions; marring the simple and beautiful system projected by our ancestors in wisdom, and handed down to us with the sanction of almost two centuries, with the sanction also of distinguished benefits.

But with all our deficiencies, we have, particularly

in New England, cherished the interests of common learning, beyond other nations. Throughout Christendom nineteen twentieths of the population are ignorant of the very rudiments of education ; to them every book is a sealed book. Even in England, we have it on high authority, as late as 1819, only one fifteenth out of that great people could read and write. But since that time, the same distinguished individual who made the statement we have mentioned, has stirred up a mighty spirit in the island ; he has been the means of sending instruction to the doors of thousands, in the manufacturing districts especially, amongst beings who possessed but little more intelligence than the steam engines and spinning jennies that surround them. He has created an excitement, that, touched by the wand of knowledge, bids fair to enlighten and regenerate a mighty mass ; to give a tone to public sentiment that will one day settle the great questions of catholic emancipation and parliamentary reform, by a more summary process than has yet been brought to the contest.

The cultivation of the common branches of learning, however, by no means implies a high degree of literary excellence. Nothing obtains for a nation so bright and permanent a reputation as her literature. Long after her vain battles have ceased, and her proud monuments have mingled with the dust, her intellectual character flourishes in all the beauty and vigour of youth ; it brightens as it goes down the

annals of time, refreshing the mind of the scholar, as the *Oasis* in the Egyptian desert solaces the weary traveller, where every thing around is dreary and barren. It was the literature of the ancients that swept away the clouds that had long been gathering around the human mind, and in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries renewed the face of Europe; it exerted an influence that still continues, that will be felt so long as the world shall last; its empire is unbounded, the empire of the mind. In this department, till very lately, we have accomplished but little; we have been busy about other things; it cannot be said of us, that "the literature of the age expresses the feelings of society;" but we trust it will be true, that we shall have something characteristic, something peculiar, something national, in the complexion of our writings, though we do speak the language, and are imbued with the thoughts, expressions, and style of the most distinguished literary people of modern times. Days of happier promise are advancing; we have scholars, and "ripe and good scholars too;" a literary spirit is growing in some measure with the physical growth of the country, and daily producing in the midst of us a higher tone of feeling and sentiment. Science too dwells here, and has her votaries, men of deep study and research, who may fearlessly compare with their brethren on the opposite shores of the Atlantic.

We live in an age of powerful and singular exer-

tion. The deep fountains are broken up; the very foundations of the world seem to be shaken; an excitement is abroad amongst the nations, that will not slumber again till its end be accomplished; enlightened man is rising in his might, and bursting the chains that bound him to earth.

Thrones, whose foundations were laid broad and deep in the darkness of the middle ages, and which have towered as if to obstruct the light that would pour in on every side, have been shaken to the very centre. The descendants of Hugh Capet have been driven as outcasts from the midst of their people, and compelled to invoke the aid of foreigners to regain an uncertain tenure of royal power. The divine right of kings has become a heretical doctrine, hardly whispered in the secret chambers of princes; and legitimacy that has sprung up in its place, and will be suffered to walk the earth for a season, and be a scourge to mankind, will ere long become a by-word amongst the nations.

We live in an age of bold speculation; opinions that have been held in high reverence, opinions that have come down to us with the sanction of time, gain no respect from their mere antiquity. The spirit of free inquiry, of fearless investigation, leaves no subject unexplored; every thing unsound is exposed; doctrines are subjected to the keenest scrutiny; the philosophy of the schools has given way to the true philosophy of the mind: errors and superstitions that

mingled with existence, and invaded every walk of life, and bound the mind in strong fetters, have disappeared from the face of society. The phenomena of the natural world, that once were considered as exerting an influence over the fortunes and destinies of individuals and nations, are disarmed of their terrors by the light of rational science. And science, which of old dwelt in the recesses of the study, the intellectual nourishment of a few, has come out amongst men to the common business of life ; she has entered the workshop of the mechanic, and has given promise of indefinite increase to national wealth, and the solid comforts of life. Political economy, as a distinct department of knowledge, and useful to all, is taking a high stand in the old and new world. Political discussions, such as shed an abundance of light on the science of government in all its branches, are carried on with a fervour that in some latitudes is termed patriotism, in others, treason. Every thing is submitted to the test of truth,—rational, enlightened truth.

Amongst ourselves we occasionally have a spirit of excitement, and sometimes the swelling language of gasconade. At the present moment, one of our sister states threatens to array herself against the Union, unless the sad remnant of the Indian tribes is driven from her borders, from the soil owned by the natives ; their birth-place, containing the bones of their fathers, and dear to them by a thousand associations of which the children of the forest are susceptible.

Georgia cries out, "we will stand by our arms, and for the support of this determination we mutually pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honour." Warm language this for a state containing a free population of scarcely one third part of that of Massachusetts, and a militia of but twenty-nine thousand men, armed with any thing and every thing but fire-arms. Warm language this to use against the whole nation. North of the Potomac, expressions like these would savour of treason; but those who live under a scorching sun, whose temperament is somewhat heated, are licensed, it seems, to talk and vapour as they please. Something too much of this; there is a decency which should be regarded by all public bodies; intemperate language implies nothing favourable of the character of a state, or of the individuals who compose it. If they must work themselves up to angry feelings, let them "in the very torrent, tempest, and whirlwind of their passion, acquire and beget a temperance, that may give it smoothness." The confederacy is too strong to be seriously affected by one of its members; the system, though disturbed, soon returns to its heathful operation.*

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* Since the above was written, it has appeared that the sentiments of the Executive and of the Committee did not meet with an exact response from the Legislature.

It is to be hoped that the existing difficulties will be terminated in a way satisfactory to all; though that, as yet, is very doubtful.

Whilst we possess many high privileges, there are some things, whose existence we lament. The slave breathes heavily on our soil. A population is rapidly increasing that weakens our national power, and sometimes excites the apprehensions of our Southern brethren. It is an evil brought upon the colonies against their consent, in opposition to their repeated remonstrances. It is an evil which all the exertions of all the active and benevolent in the land cannot remove. For its existence at this time the present generation is not answerable; but we have a heavy charge to answer at the bar of humanity; we have extended the privilege, if privilege it may be called, to the new states, and at a time when the opportunity was most favourable to stay forever its progress in the west. The principle is established, that states created by the power of Congress, and subject to whatsoever other conditions, shall not be restrained from holding their fellow men in perpetual servitude. Humanity sickens at the thought that the evil is to spread to an indefinite extent, as new sovereignties are admitted into the American confederacy. Patriotism grieves as she thinks of the scenes that may one day occur, should this blind mass of bondmen attempt to shake off their chains. Christianity shudders that such numbers of human beings should be left in ignorance of the relation between man and his God.

There is another evil existing in the midst of us, of the most alarming nature, and spreading on every side like a pestilence. It blasts the prospects of youth and destroys the usefulness of manhood. It is said, that in habits of intemperance we exceed any civilized nation on earth.

I have not come up hither to assume the office of the moralist; but if this be so, I would say, that as men, we should value too highly the nature we possess, as freemen, we should feel too proud to sacrifice our reason at the shrine of this degrading vice. We have gained the mastery over others; we should respect and govern ourselves. The circumstances in which we are placed are favourable to the exercise of every worthy sentiment, to the growth of all that exalts individual character, and gives it fine and manly proportions. But then we must be true to ourselves, and not sink man, rational man, to a mere animal existence, and that of the lowest kind.

Let us turn away our thoughts from these considerations to the brighter recollections that gather around and hallow our revolution.

There have been wars to stay the incursion of barbarians, to support some imaginary point of national honour, to sustain the balance of power, to secure or defeat the succession of a particular family to a throne. There have been wars, too, for the protection of homes and firesides. But compared with all these, we claim a proud pre-eminence. In none were questions

at issue that were ordained to exercise so powerful an influence over the destinies of future generations, I may say of mankind. Marathon and Platæa delivered the states of Greece from the threatening power of the Persian; but it resulted only in perpetual conflicts amongst themselves. They were free, but it was the freedom of licentiousness; they were free, but it was the tempestuous rage of the ocean; they were free, but it was only that they might become a spoil to each other.

> "Greece! thy hard hand oppressed
> And crushed the helpless; thou didst make thy soil
> Drunk with the blood of those that loved thee best;
> And thou didst drive from thy unnatural breast
> Thy just and brave to die in distant climes."

Our purpose was higher and more sacred. We claimed the right of managing our own affairs in our own way, without undue foreign interference. We claimed it from a nation that should have cherished us with the kindness of a parent, and were rejected with scorn; from a nation that was "bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh," and received our answer at the edge of the sword. We were forced to stand in hostile array against those who should have bid us, God speed; to be armed against those who should have extended the hand of friendship, as to members of the same family and possessing a common ancestry. But the olive branch had withered. An effort was to be made in a cause worthy of every sacrifice. It

was a spectacle of moral grandeur to behold men venturing their lives in support of a noble principle, that the nations of the earth knew not of,—a principle that kings would not recognise. It was a scene of awful interest; it severed the strongest ties; the bands of intimacy, the restraints of kindred were broken; those who had lived in the closest friendship were forced to separate; children and parents were found on opposite sides; and the love of country wellnigh extinguished the claims of blood. These scenes have passed away, but they formed a nucleus around which have gathered the hopes and the patriotism of other lands. The example spread; the nation that came to our aid in the day of our deepest distress, fell a prey to those who would be thought her friends. There, the pressure of long standing abuses increased the elastic power of resistance, till religion and law, all the landmarks of property, all that was refined and excellent, were swept away in one common destruction.

But good was done, deduced even from the very outrages that humanity had suffered. Good was done; for man began to question, in a tone rather louder than whispers, the tenure by which he was held in servitude. He began to imagine that he had some rights; and though his views were limited, because of the darkness that ages of ignorance and oppression had scattered around him, he saw through it a few distant rays, that in some measure shed light

upon his path; a flame that many waters cannot quench, that shall increase till it shall become strong, and cast its blaze abroad, and penetrate the gloomy recesses of despotism, and nations shall rejoice and walk in the light.

The good influence still spread, opposed by the governments, but secretly cherished by many of their subjects, and since, the destruction of imperial power in France has found its way to almost every part of Europe, even to the shores of Italy and the Peninsula. But the death-like silence of ignorance and superstition reigned *there*, and proved to the world that sterner fates, and deeper misery and misrule must be their portion, before the great change, which is delayed for a season, can arrive.

But the prospect brightens elsewhere. Pass over Austria and her dependencies, where an apathy and degradation exist that almost call for a new creation, and extend your views to the north. "The wheel is come full circle." Political improvement has invaded the circles of Germany; in Wurtemburg, Bavaria, Baden, Weimar, and indeed in most of the confederate states, constitutions which afford full security to life, liberty, and property, are in successful operation. Prussia, too, has reformed most of the abuses, that, having their origin with the feudal system, have come down even to this century. She has established universities, and raised the lowly, and abolished many of the unjust immunities of the higher

orders. And Russia, despotic as that government is in principle, is building up, with astonishing rapidity, free schools for her whole population of forty-five millions, and is entering upon the cultivation of literature and the arts with all the ardour of youth. In the end it will prove that every government whatsoever must gradually yield to the force of public opinion, or public opinion will model anew the government. It is a power not to be despised at the present day; though silenced for a time, it will be felt; though limited it will spread, till sceptres acknowledge its sway. Let us rejoice at the efforts that are making to improve the political condition of man, and exalt, by necessary consequence, his intellectual being. Let us rejoice at every attempt to reform abuses, to engraft the popular principle in other governments, to cherish the interests of education, whose influences extend through this life, and, connected with religion, purify for another.

We stand before the world, and afford a practical illustration of the advantages derived from liberal institutions. Let us indulge the hope, that whilst this whole continent, from Canada to Cape Horn, is emancipated from foreign dominion, the nations may reach our political security, whatever forms of government they may choose; we can wish them no greater blessing.

We also have a sacred duty to perform; it is not to lay foundations, and build thereupon,—that has al-

ready been done by venerable men. Our duty is to sustain the noble fabric; to enter it with clean hands and pure hearts; to guard and hand down a spotless administration of justice; to discountenance all tumult; to improve our systems of education; to protect our excellent constitutions from those, who, under the name of reform, would touch them with unskilful hands; to ward off intrigue and corruption, that may one day break in like a flood; and, whilst we reverence the institutions of religion, to avoid the persecution that consists, not at the present day in fire and faggot, but in a spirit intolerant, in remarks severe and cruel, in suspicions of the sincerity of those who do not see with our eyes.

There is that which is called *cant*, a term used by the irreligious against whatever is sincere and holy: there is that which is really *cant*, abounding in the world, and used as a cloak for hypocrisy, that covers the depravity of the heart, and tends to bring religion into contempt. Free inquiry and perfect toleration in practice will, more than any thing else, set these matters right; as for perfect agreement it never will be, it never can be; God, in his wisdom, has prohibited it by the very constitution of the human mind.

Whilst we are watchful of our liberties, it is another part of our duty to cherish in recollection,—grateful recollection,—the memory of those, who, in our behalf, for themselves, for distant posterity, for

all that constitutes the idea of country, passed through the toils and dangers, the distress and sufferings of the war that changed us from dependent provinces to self-governing and free states. They were champions for a nobler cause than history records; in a conflict where unsuccessful resistance would have brought on the punishment of rebellion; and those whom we reverence as the master spirits of the day, whose names gather fresh glory as time rolls along, would have suffered the ignominious death of traitors. The late celebration on the heights of Charlestown, shows that the cold and selfish interests of the day have not effaced the feeling of gratitude, that should glow in every bosom, nor its expression, that should fall from every tongue; gratitude, whose loudest breathings cannot swell too high the notes of praise that should spring from the heart.

Nor should we forget him, who, in his youth, in the gloomiest period of the war, came to these shores, and laid bare his arm in our defence. Of noble origin, he threw off the distinctions to which his rank gave him title. He left the pomp and gaiety of the court of the youthful and unfortunate Louis, the fascinations that dwelt around the lovely queen, "that delightful vision, glittering like the morning star, full of life, and splendour, and joy," and flew to offer his services as a volunteer in a cause that was still doubtful; to a people without a name amongst the nations of the earth; to pour out his wealth to supply

the necessities of an army poorly fed, worse clothed, and almost dispirited ; to shed his blood for suffering men, to whom he was bound by no tie of language, acquaintance, or country. He left us a little one ; he returns to visit us, and is receiving the freely offered, grateful homage of millions. He has come amongst us, like a good spirit descending from higher spheres ; he takes away the bitterness of our little altercations ; he unites all hearts ; he leads us back to the early scenes, where he did and suffered so much for us. And now that he is soon to leave these shores, and forever, we would dwell upon his virtue and his deeds, and show the world that freemen are not insensible to the sacred demands of gratitude. We all remember the enthusiasm which swelled in our bosoms, when he was received amongst us ; " when the ear heard him, then it blessed him ; when the eye saw him, it gave witness to him." We will cherish the *deep* feeling when it ceases to break out in open acclamation. We bid him farewell, with the earnest prayer that the singular vicissitudes of his former life, and the glorious and heartfelt scenes that have marked his progress the last year, may be crowned with a tranquil and happy old age.

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